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David Greenman

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Abstract

Sees classical influence in the quest patterns of Tolkien's heroes. Tuor fits the pattern of Aeneas (the Escape Quest) and the hobbits in *Return of the King* follow that of Odysseus (the Return Quest).

Additional Keywords

Homer. The Odyssey—Influence on J.R.R. Tolkien; Homer. The Odyssey—Return quest—compared to The Return of the King; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Tuor; Tolkien, J.R.R. “The Fall of Gondolin”; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings. “The Scouring of the Shire”; Vergil. Aeneid—Escape quest—Compared to “Fall of Gondolin”; Vergil. Aeneid—Influence on J.R.R. Tolkien

Aeneidic and Odyssean Patterns of Escape and Return

in Tolkien's *The Fall of Gondolin* and *The Return of the King*

David Greenman

Most people with a dedicated interest in heroic-quest literature would see Aeneas and Odysseus as among the most prominent exemplars of the Escape Quest and the Return Quest, respectively. Each of these archetypal heroes undergoes, in the course of his adventures, a series of encounters along the lines perhaps best elucidated by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Here, I will discuss the consistently developed Aeneidic pattern of Escape that I discern in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Fall of Gondolin" and the similarly calculated employment of the Odyssean pattern of Return that I believe informs the concluding chapters of *The Return of the King*, the last volume of *The Lord of the Rings*.

"The Fall of Gondolin" is one of Tolkien's first extensive works, written in 1916-17. *The Return of the King* is his last major work, completed in the early 1950s. Thus, I will be demonstrating ways he is influenced by the narrative methodology of the classics both at the outset and at the conclusion of his authorial career. There is a certain chronological fittingness, I think, in the fact that Tolkien's early quest-hero, Tuor, escapes, like Aeneas, from the ruins of an old kingdom and goes on to establish new lands, while his late quest-heroes, four hobbits from the Shire, return, like Odysseus, to their original homeland which has been desecrated in their absence and which must be made free of enemy invaders before a reign of peace can be established. Like Aeneas, Tuor accepts the challenge of forging a new world for his people to dwell in, after Escape; like Odysseus, the hobbits must labor to establish the chance for peace in a locale of past happiness, after Return.

I: The Aeneid and The Fall of Gondolin

A good way to appreciate Tolkien's narrative art in "The Fall of Gondolin," is to notice that it is built upon many features of the pattern of Book II in Virgil's *The Aeneid*. But since Tolkien adheres very carefully to his own mythology and borrows imaginatively rather than slavishly from Virgil, we perhaps do not readily notice in Tuor's escape from Gondolin the modern British author's rendition of the ancient Roman poet's account of his hero's necessary abandonment of Troy.

At first glance it is easier to discern apparent discrepancies than similarities. *The Aeneid* is written in verse while "The Fall of Gondolin" is in prose. *The Aeneid*'s escape story

is only twenty-eight pages long (in the C. Day Lewis translation). "The Fall of Gondolin" is a forty-eight page story (in *The Book of Lost Tales*, Part Two). Yet, no one would dispute the poetical character of Tolkien's prose in this story, and as for length, the opening portion deals with Tuor's mission to Gondolin, his arrival, and his sojourn there—a period covering many years, and not, strictly speaking, a part of the escape pattern. The remainder of the story (about two-thirds of the whole) is roughly as long as Virgil's episode and, like Book II of *The Aeneid*, describes the destruction of the city and the hasty exodus.

A close inspection of the escape patterns in the two narratives reveals a number of significant comparisons, and it reveals Tolkien's creativity in adapting and transforming the Virgilian story to suit his own purposes. Tolkien's narrator is the bardic figure Littleheart, son of Bronweg/Voronwe who had served as friend and follower of Tuor.¹ What Tolkien loses in personal immediacy by not having the hero describe his own adventures as Virgil did (for Aeneas recounts his experience to Queen Dido), he gains in epic distancing and reader or audience respect for a venerable tale of historic significance. Virgil, of course, enjoys these things when *The Aeneid* as a whole is considered. Littleheart's listeners are certainly moved emotionally, for at the end "no one in all the room of Logs spake or moved for a great while" (FG 197).

Both stories involve the active participation of the gods. Juno and Neptune decide that Troy must be destroyed, while Melko earmarks Gondolin for destruction. Virgil's hero's divine mother, Venus, aids his and his companions' escape, while Ulmo, Lord of the Waters, helps Tuor and his group of refugees. Indeed, it is the powerful presence of the gods in both stories that provides the necessary epic magnitude, for without their activity we would simply have a pair of scaled-down war stories about besieged cities. Yet, Tolkien's divinities differ markedly from Virgil's; they are clearly good (Ulmo) or clearly evil (Melko) while the Roman's deities are either supportive or hostile towards Aeneas and Troy, but their moral natures are not in question.

The Greeks have been attacking Troy for ten years and Melko has been searching centuries for the hidden city of Gondolin in order to destroy it, but in both tales the features that pertain to Escape are pressurized and dramatic, filled with the dangers of hurrying and worry-

ing, and encompassing about the same amount of elapsed time. Yet, in these features we will see that Tolkien wears his Virgil with a difference.

The Greeks, after ten years of fighting, have not done any serious damage to the well-fortified city of Troy, so in desperation they resort to subterfuge. Sinon, pretending to be a victim of the Greeks, wins the trust of King Priam and persuades him to bring the gigantic horse—secretly loaded with Greek warriors—inside the gates. Tolkien's traitor, Meglin, also facilitates the entry of a profusion of Orc-laden metallic monsters into the city. But, unlike the heretofore unknown Sinon, Meglin is the king's trusted nephew. For years he has lusted after Princess Idril (wife of Tuor) and coveted power. His heart has been blackening in hatred for Tuor all this while and he finally betrays his own people by willingly advising Melko how to destroy Gondolin: "He bid him make beasts like snakes and dragons of irresistible might that should overcreep the Encircling Hills and lap that plain and its fair city in flame and death" (FG 169). These facts, added to Meglin's subsequent dastardly behavior during the siege, make him a major villain,² a status not ascribable to Sinon. Virgil's "traitor," in deceiving the Trojans, is in fact only doing his job as an undercover man for his own army, and he is not heard of again after his one successful maneuver.

An aura of divine favor surrounds both Aeneas and Tuor. The Trojan is frequently referred to respectfully as "goddess-born" and Tuor is paid deference as the special servant of Ulmo. His physical appearance is so markedly different from other men of those days that at first sight of him the Noldolian Gnomes (Elves) are caught "marvelling at the stature and gaunt limbs of Tuor, his heavy spear barbed with fish bone and his great harp. Rugged was his aspect, and his locks were unkempt, and he was clad in the skins of bears [and] his deep and rolling voice held them in amaze" (FG 159-60). Whereas Aeneas first learns of his divine commission to find a new homeland for his people in a dream vision of Hector, the dead Trojan leader who reveals it to him, Tuor gets his instructions directly from Ulmo. Tuor is to convince Turgon, king of Gondolin, either to prepare for an offensive attack on Melko's stronghold or to abandon Gondolin and return to the holy land of Valinor. Tuor's message about divinely foreseen changes in the world echoes the words of Aeneas' messenger Ilieneus, not in Book II of *The Aeneid*, but in Book VII, when the escape party has landed in Italy and King Latinus is told:

At heaven's express command, fate's bidding, we sought out Your land. From here Dardanus took his origin, hence Apollo recalls us, strictly enjoining that we come back To Tuscan Tiber and the sacred pools of Numicius' spring.
(TA 162)

Fatefully, neither Latinus nor Turgon accept the will of the gods, with disastrous results to their kingdoms. Turgon's refusal to obey Ulmo has the consequence of propelling Tuor, years later, into the Aeneidic role of leader of Gondolin's refugees who must find a new homeland.

Both Aeneas and Tuor have important roles as fathers of young sons upon whom the future of the race depends. As Aeneas' people are about to evacuate Troy, "A sudden crash of thunder, and a shooting star slid down / The sky's dark face, drawing a trail of light behind it." (TA 55)

A tongue of flame erupts on Ascanius' head, yet does not harm him—a forecast of his future role as leader of the people. While Tuor's son Eärendel is a mere babe his beauty is breathtaking: "his skin of a shining white and his eyes ... bluer than the sapphires of the raiment of Manwe" (FG 165). Even before the birth of Eärendel Ulmo prophesied to Tuor "of a surety a child shall come of thee than whom no man shall know more of the uttermost deeps, be it of the sea or of the firmament of heaven" (FG 155). Tolkien's subsequent shaping of his mythology has Eärendil become the heavenly mariner who sails across the heavens protecting the earth below after destroying the winged dragons and mountain fortress of Melko/Morgoth.

The wives of both escape-heroes are very significant, but in vastly different ways. Aeneas' first wife, Creusa, mother of Ascanius, must perish in Troy so that her husband can later marry the princess Lavinia and blend the Trojan and Italian bloodlines to produce the Roman People. Both of Aeneas' wives are passive characters, but in "The Fall of Gondolin," Idriel, Turgon's daughter, is a most forceful figure. She becomes the first Gnome to marry a mortal. Her beauty rivals Helen's, whose beauty was a cause of the Trojan War. But unlike Helen who willingly left her husband for a Trojan lover, Idriel had always rejected the advances of Meglin. Nevertheless, her beauty plays a great part in Meglin's betrayal of Gondolin, since he plans, with Melko's help, to take her by force. In *The Aeneid* Cassandra is a prophetess never believed by her people despite her always accurate forecasts. She tries unsuccessfully to warn the Trojans of the presence of Greeks in the horse. Idriel too has a premonition of impending danger, but her advice to build a secret escape-tunnel which eventually saves her family is heeded by her friends.

Another point of contact between *The Aeneid* and *The Fall of Gondolin* centers on Tolkien's variation on the Andromache theme. After Aeneas has left Troy he encounters Andromache, widow of Hector and mother of Astyanax, a child who had been mercilessly destroyed when the vengeful Pyrrhus flung him from the walls of Troy during the siege. When Eärendel was an infant Idriel had dreamed that Meglin threw him into a furnace. During the actual siege of Gondolin, Meglin indeed "thought now to take Eärendel and cast him into the fire beneath the walls . . . Meglin had Idriel by the hair and sought to drag her to the battlements out of cruelty of heart that she might see the fall of Eärendel to the flames" (FG 177-78). But unlike Andromache, who is helpless, Idriel fights "like a tigress for all her beauty and slenderness" (FG 178); Tuor comes to her aid and in a surprising reversal hurls Meglin over the walls to his death.

Later, during the height of the battle, although Idriel

grieves deeply because her father Turgon is fatally trapped in his tower, she clasps the knees of Tuor to prevent him from certain death in his wish to save Turgon. This incident replicates a scene in *The Aeneid* in which Creusa clasps her husband Aeneas' knees and begs him not to return to the raging battle in the streets.

Both Virgil and Tolkien display splendid descriptive talents in their artful depictions of the chaotic ruins of Troy and Gondolin. Yet, both authors are more concerned with human emotions than with the sensationalism involved in showing the ravages of fire and sword, despite their vivid presentations of the spectacles of toppling towers and heroic skirmishes. In *The Aeneid*, we behold the bloodthirsty fury of Pyrrhus, the terrible grief of Queen Hecuba as she sees both her husband and son slaughtered before her eyes, and the flaring anger of Aeneas as he catches sight of Helen whom he blames for all the trouble. We are aware of Aeneas' anxiety for his family's safety and his despairing determination to die fighting:

Men! dear hearts so vainly
Valiant! ...

let us die, let us charge into the battle's heart!
Losers have one salvation—to give up all hope of salvation.
(TA 45)

In "The Fall of Gondolin," Tuor displays anguish when it appears that Eärendel is lost, and Idril's emotions run high when she watches her father die and when in the same tumultuous moment she is reunited with her husband, whom she had feared slain.

Both authors deepen the tragic atmosphere by placing the attacks on the doomed cities at moments of joyous festivals. Troy's people "poor fools, whose very last day it was, festooned / The shrines of the gods with holiday foliage all over the city." (TA 42) The demise of the Gondolothlim occurs during the celebration of Tarnin Austa, the Gates of Summer, when solemnly, "no voice was uttered in the city from midnight till the break of day, but the dawn they hailed with ancient songs" (FG 172). But this particular dawn brings with it the fire-serpents of Melko. Whereas the scene in Troy is one of confusion, Gondolin has a very brief time to prepare hastily for the attack. Tolkien takes advantage of these moments to describe the colorfully armed forces of the Eleven Houses of the City—the people of the Fountain, of the Tower of Snow, of the Harp, and others. Given the fact of the complete surprise of the Greek intrusion, Virgil must here forego the stately epic convention of the catalogue of troops. He provides striking instances of it, however, in later parts of his poem, and these descriptions plainly have moved Tolkien to emulation, not only in "The Fall of Gondolin," but also in *The Lord of the Rings*.³

One memorable scene in each work involves the heroes literally carrying dear ones on their backs, out of the ruins of the cities. Aeneas concludes his narration of Book II of *The Aeneid* in simple but deeply felt words: "Troy was

beyond all hope of aid. / I accepted defeat, picked up my father and made for the mountains." (TA 59) Tuor, after being rescued by the Gnome Ethelion from the attack by Gothmog, lord of Balrogs, returns the favor after Ethelion is wounded by helping him escape a charging dragon:

Then Ethelion must lean on Tuor, and Tuor might not leave him, though the very feet of the trampling beast were upon them, and they were like to be overborne: but Tuor hewed at a foot of the creature so that flame-sprouted forth, and that serpent screamed, lashing with its tail; and many of both Orcs and Noldoli got their death therefrom. Now Tuor gathered his might and lifted Ethelion, and amid a remnant of the folk got thereunder and escaped the drake.
(FG 181)

Perhaps the one scene in each work that would make an indelible imprint on the imaginations of all readers is the death of the king. Virgil's description of Priam's death inspired Shakespeare to re-create it in *Hamlet*.⁴

There is probably no more deeply pathetic moment in *The Aeneid* than that in which feeble old Priam tries to fight Pyrrhus: "the old man flung his weapon, but harmlessly — / No strength behind it: a clang when the shield of Pyrrhus parried it." (TA 51) Then Pyrrhus butchers Priam:

Now die! Even as he spoke, he dragged the old man, trembling, And sliding in the pool of his son's blood, right to the altar; Twined Priam's hair in his left hand, raised with his right the flashing sword, and sank it up to the hilt between his ribs. Such was Priam's end, the close decreed by destiny— That in his dying hour he should see Troy blazing, falling.
(TA 51)

Tolkien prefers to provide his King Turgon with a heroic end rather than a piteous one. In this he shows once again that in following Virgil he can nevertheless display his own originality. Turgon

climbed to the topmost pinnacle of that white tower that stood high his palace. There he shouted in a voice like a horn blown among the mountains, and all that were gathered beneath the Trees and the foemen in the mists of the square heard him: "Great is the victory of the Noldoli!" And 'tis said that it was then middle night, and that the Orcs yelled in derision. (FG 185)

Shortly thereafter, with a fire-drake "coiled even on the very steps of the palace," (FG 186)

a great noise and a yelling rose from that place of anguish. Behold, the tower leapt into a flame and in a stab of fire it fell, for the dragons crushed the base of it and all who stood there. Great was the clangour of that terrible fall, and therein passed Turgon King of the Gondolothlim, and for that hour the victory was to Melko. (FG 187)

The demise of the king is not without its pathos, for, as in *The Aeneid* when Priam dies, the destroyer defiles the holy altar and its protective laurel tree, in "The Fall of Gondolin" Tolkien sadly reports the blighting of the two Trees in front of Turgon's tower—trees that are offshoots of the two holy Trees of Light in Valinor—"Glingol was withered to the stock and Bansil was blackened utterly" (FG 186).

II: *The Odyssey* and *The Return of the King*

If Tolkien is unslavish in adapting *The Aeneid's* pattern of Escape to "The Fall of Gondolin," when he composes *The Lord of the Rings' Return* segment in *The Return of the King* nearly forty years later, he becomes highly original in reshaping *The Odyssey's* pattern. Indeed, Tolkien's refinement is so thorough, that it takes a practiced eye to discern the connections, somewhat like Gandalf's keen observation of the letters on the Ring or on the doorway of Moria. A reader would be following the wrong path by assuming that King Elessar's return to Gondor, spectacular as that is, is anything like the Homeric Return.

We should look briefly at the king's return so that we can appreciate the real Odyssean pattern that develops later:

Behold! upon the foremost ship a great standard broke, and the wind displayed it as she turned towards the Harlond. There flowered a White Tree, and that was for Gondor; but Seven Stars were about it, and a high crown above it, the signs of Elendil that no lord had borne for years beyond count. And the stars flamed in the sunlight, for they were wrought of gems by Arwen daughter of Elrond; and the crown was bright in the morning, for it was wrought of mithril and gold.

Thus came Aragorn son of Arathorn, Elessar, Isildur's heir, out of the Paths of the Dead, borne upon a wind from the Sea to the kingdom of Gondor. (RK 123)

We must now shift to the subdued and uneasy return to the Shire by four weary hobbits in order to see how Tolkien transforms *The Odyssey's* pattern of Return. It begins like this:

At last the hobbits had their faces turned towards home. They were eager now to see the Shire again; but at first they rode only slowly, for Frodo had been ill at ease. When they came to the Ford of Bruinen, he had halted, and seemed loath to ride into the stream; and they noted that for a while his eyes appeared not to see them or things about him. All that day he was silent. (RK 268)

We must be aware at the outset that there is a vast discrepancy in the amount of space allotted to the Return between *The Odyssey* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Homer's Return narrative comprises fully half of the work. The final twelve books (out of twenty-four) are devoted to the adventures of Odysseus after he sets foot on the home shores of Ithaka. This amounts to one hundred-sixty-one pages out of three hundred-thirty-two. Conversely, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the Return section involves merely three chapters out of sixty-two or forty-four pages out of one thousand-forty-two. By devoting so much space to the Return in his poem Homer can afford to build the tensions slowly and inexorably, and to indulge in numerous opportunities for digressions like the disguised Odysseus' famous "lying tales." Tolkien takes a far different tack; he builds his intensity rapidly; he creates a superb miniature or a microcosm of the Homeric original, with many details of likeness or of deliberate contrast—like a Lothlórien in relationship to a Valinor.

Both Ithaka and the Shire are drastically altered upon

the returns of the heroes, but these situations are not complete surprises to them. Earlier, Odysseus heard of the insolent suitors of his wife when he encountered the shade of the seer Teiresias in his visit to the gates of the Underworld (ODY 171). During the visit to Lothlórien Sam got a futuristic glimpse of the chaos in the Shire by looking into Galadriel's Mirror (FR 378). More important than the fact of troubles at home is the way Tolkien departs from Homer in handling them. The goddess Athene provides Odysseus with direct support; she disguises him by altering his looks, and she suggests to him whom to trust and what procedures to follow. On the other hand, the Wizard Gandalf curtly refuses to help the hobbits:

"I am not coming to the Shire. You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for. Do you not yet understand? My time is over: it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folk to do so." (RK 275)

Yet there is a hidden similarity in these obviously contrasting situations. Athene favors Odysseus, she tells him, "because you are fluent, and reason closely, and keep your head always" (ODY 206). Gandalf adds, in speaking to the hobbits, "And as for you, my dear friends, you will need no help. You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high; among the great you are, and I have no longer any fear at all for any of you" (RK 275). Like Odysseus, the returning hobbits—Frodo, Merry, Pippin, and Sam—are about to display remarkable powers of fluency, reason, and self-control.

Whereas Odysseus is a solitary figure returning home, Tolkien divides the returning hero's role among the four above-mentioned hobbits. Odysseus does not remain isolated, for he quickly gains the support of a faithful group of allies: his son Telemachos, the swineherd Eumaios, the oxherd Philoitios, and the old nurse Eurykleia. Yet, none of these humble allies usurp Odysseus' place as hero, so what Tolkien does is essentially different. A closer comparison may be seen in the unfaithful figures. *The Odyssey*, of course, features all those young Ithakans who snub Odysseus' authority and lay siege to his wife. But in Tolkien these are approximated by the "ruffians" of Saruman who must be seen as foreign invaders. A closer link is that between Odysseus' unfaithful servants and several of the citizens of the Shire. While the Greek hero's swineherd, oxherd, and old nurse are faithful, his goatherd Melanthios, and a number of young women of the household who have become paramours of Penelope's suitors, are unfaithful. In the Shire there are several corrupt hobbits: Lotho Baggins, Hob Hayword, and Ted Sandyman. Sandyman resembles Melanthios in openly revelling in his disgusting behavior of aiding the intruders and being disloyal to the community.

Tolkien's division of the hero's role is precisely calculated. Frodo is generally regarded as the leader, but the other hobbits share responsibilities and display different Odyssean traits. When he made revisions in his manuscripts, Tolkien deliberately heightened Frodo's role as a counsellor and Merry's as a general. Formerly, he had

Frodo directing operations and speaking authoritatively to Bill Ferny. But in the published version, Merry takes over these tasks. In *The Odyssey*, when all the trouble is over, Odysseus enjoys reunions with his wife and father. In *The Return of the King*, Sam has a hasty moment of reunion with his girlfriend Rosie and her father while the troubles are still brewing. Penelope tests Odysseus' identity through a tricky reference to their marriage bed, but she is extraordinarily glad that he is home. Rosie has no doubts about who Sam is, but she can't resist scolding him a little for his tardy return: "I've been expecting you since the Spring. You haven't hurried, have you?" (RK 287).

There are a number of other changes rung by Tolkien on the Odyssean Return sequence, and they are very carefully conceived. Not only does Odysseus look different from people's expectations, the hobbits too surprise all who behold them. They arrive clad in armor and cloaks of the March and Gondor, and the rigors of military experience and the hardships of journeying have toughened them remarkably. Merry and Pippin have been quaffing "Entdrafts," which have operated on them as a growth elixir; these two cause all who behold them to gape in wonder. Frodo and Sam may look about the same as before, but having survived the agonizing arduous trek to Mount Doom and along the way done battle with Shelob, Orcs, Sauron himself, and others, these two have undergone the most significant personal changes. A compelling difference between Odysseus and Frodo is in their respective states of physical and mental health. Odysseus is hale and hearty after his harrowing adventures, and he plans to resume his kingship in full authority. Athene even reverses her cosmetic maneuvers and enhances his good looks when he has finally routed the suitors. But Frodo's Return cannot be permanent. "There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?" (RK 268).

Odysseus finds his homestead under a veritable state of siege; his wife even barricades herself in her chamber while the suitors revel and waste the stores. Frodo's Shire has shockingly become a mini-Mordor "full o' wheels and outlandish contraptions," as Farmer Cotton explains, referring to the ruffians' ruinous behavior under Sharkey/Saruman. "They're always a-hammering and a-letting out a smoke and a stench, and there isn't no peace even at night in Hobbiton" (RK 292-93).

The Odyssey relentlessly repeats that it is Odysseus' duty and clear intention to kill the suitors—men of Ithaka—who are disrupting his regal home. But on returning to the Shire Frodo delivers a specific injunction not to kill any hobbits, or even non-hobbits:

"Fight!" said Frodo. "Well, I suppose it may come to that. But remember: there is to be no slaying of hobbits, not even if they have gone over to the other side. Really gone over, I mean; not just obeying ruffians' orders because they are frightened. No hobbit has ever killed another on

purpose in the Shire, and it is not to begin now. And nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped. Keep your tempers and hold your hands to the last possible moment!" (RK 285)

Odysseus strings the massive bow and slaughters all the suitors; there are no casualties to his small band of supporters. However, when the hobbits surround the ruffians, they are forced to kill nearly seventy of them, and more serious, nineteen hobbits are also killed.⁵

In revealing his identity to the suitors just prior to slaying them, Odysseus speaks angrily. The mood is one of wrathful, though just, revenge:

You dogs, you never thought that I would any more come back from the land of Troy, and because of that you despised my household, and forcibly took my serving women to sleep beside you, and sought to win my wife while I was still alive, fearing neither the immortal gods who hold the wide heaven, nor any resentment sprung from men to be yours in the future. Now upon all of you the terms of destruction are fastened (ODY 322)

In contrast, when Frodo and company appear at Saruman's door after having removed the ruffians, it is the defeated ex-wizard who reveals himself to them, outwardly showing no sign of fear. But he is suddenly slain by his own outraged, victimized slave Wormtongue. The mood here is one of sorrow:

To the dismay of those that stood by, about the body of Saruman a grey mist gathered, and rising slowly to a great height like smoke from a fire, as a pale shrouded figure it loomed over the Hill. For a moment it wavered, looking to the West; but out of the West came a cold wind, and it bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing.


Frodo looked down at the body with pity and horror, for as he looked it seemed that long years of death were suddenly revealed in it, and it shrank, and the shrivelled face became rags of skin upon a hideous skull. Lifting up the skirt of the dirty cloak that sprawled beside it, he covered it over, and turned away.⁶ (RK 300)

The aftermath period in *The Odyssey* starts grimly. Odysseus orders the unfaithful servant women to scrub away the gore of the dead suitors, then executes them too. The comparable period in *The Return of the King* starts happily, with the rebuilding of the Shire and the removal of all signs of Saruman's handiwork. Sam becomes a Johnny Appleseed figure, going about the countryside, planting saplings and carefully dispersing the dust from Lothlórien given him by Galadriel, which brings the trees to beautiful fruition. He crowns his efforts with the planting of the silver nut that grows into "the only mallorn [tree] west of the Mountains and east of the Sea; and one of the finest in the World" (RK 303). *The Odyssey* ends happily, in the hero's reunion with his family, after a nonthreatening allusion to Odysseus' further necessary travels and second homecoming to live out life to a green old age. But *The Return of the King* ends poignantly, as Frodo leaves Mid-

dle-earth altogether, to sail to the West with Gandalf and Galadriel. Sam, Frodo's "heir," returns to the Shire after witnessing Frodo's departure, to become its leading citizen for the rest of his life.

We might leave our comparison of the Homer and Tolkien Return Patterns at that, but for what Tolkien did next, then decided to forego publicly. I refer to the as yet unpublished "Epilogue" to *The Lord of the Rings*. It concludes with a brief husband-wife dialogue between Sam and Rose, reminiscent of *The Odyssey's* intimate moments between Odysseus and Penelope in Book XXIII. And the "Epilogue's" final two sentences inject a suddenly dramatic moment that shows Sam caught up in an uncharacteristic mood for him, but one that is hauntingly Odyssean. Homer's hero will in due course once again feel the lure of the sea and call to adventure. Sam, though at this point a *paterfamilias* and the Shire's most honored and seemingly ensconced resident, stands transfixed upon hearing the siren call of the same sea over which his beloved master Frodo has sailed to the Undying Lands. This call Sam evidently long nurtures deeply in his breast, for we know from "The Tale of the Years" attached to the conclusion of *The Lord of the Rings*, that in the year 1482 of the Shire-Reckoning, sixty-three years after his return, upon the death of Rose, "Samwise passed the Towers and went to the Grey Havens, and passed over Sea, last of the Ring-bearers" (RK 378).

In looking closely at the ways J.R.R. Tolkien re-creates Aeneid and Odyssean patterns of Escape and Return in the stories I have been examining, we have discerned some notable similarities to the original classical epics, and some no less notable creative differences. Both similarities and differences are manifest in such features as narrative methodologies; characteristics of the characters (heroes, wives, children, helpers, antagonists); incidents of pathos, spectacle, symbolism, and death.

I think we may justly claim that for adapting material from Homer and Virgil in truly unique ways, Tolkien approaches Dante in fertility of imagination and deftness of execution. While our new understanding of Tolkien's renderings may not cause us to fall into rapt silence like Littleheart's audience, it should certainly increase our respect and pleasure the next time we read of Tuor or the hobbits bravely foraging in their perilous realms. 

Notes

1. The "helper" or "companion" to the hero has always been important to the success of the quest. Joseph Campbell includes him in a stipulated position, regularly to be encountered, in his well-known diagram "Threshold of Adventure" in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, sees him as the reverse of the traitor figure.
2. In *The Silmarillion*, Maeglin's treachery is cited as "most infamous in all the histories of the Elder Days" (S 242).
3. Robert E. Morse provides a close comparison of *The Aeneid's* catalogue

of troops with that of the march of Gondor's allies in *Evocation of Virgil* in *Tolkien's Art* (S2).

4. The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble
When he lay couched in the ominous horse,
Hath now this dread and black complexion smear'd
With heraldry more dismal. Head to foot
Now is he total gules, horribly trick'd
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,
Bak'd and impasted with the parching streets,
That lend a tyrannous and a damned light
To their lord's murder. Roasted in wrath and fire,
And thus o'ersized with coagulate gore,
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks. . .

Anon he finds him,
Striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword,
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region; so after Pyrrhus' pause
Aroused vengeance sets him new awork,
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall
On Mars' armour, for'd for proof eterne,
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam.
Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods
In general synd take away her power,
Break all the spokes and felloes from her wheel,
And bow the round nave down the hill of heaven
As low as to the fiends.

(Hamlet 2.2.449-93)

5. The Marquette University Tolkien manuscript shows that Tolkien increased the numbers from fifty to seventy for the slain ruffians and from eleven to nineteen for the hobbits. I interpret this increase as a reflection of his desire to expand the "magnitude" of the epic confrontation — a feature approved in Aristotle's *Poetics*.
6. This deeply moving passage, one of the most memorable in all of *The Lord of the Rings*, is one of the best examples to be found of Tolkien's remarkable penchant for improving his work through revision. As late as "the eleventh hour" this description did not even exist. He added it to the printer's galley sheets just before the moment of publication (Marquette University Tolkien Manuscripts).
7. This fragment, too good to remain unpublished, remains in manuscript in the Marquette University Tolkien collection. There remains a prohibition on direct quotation.
8. I wish to thank Canisius College for a travel grant, and Marquette University for access to the Tolkien manuscript collection.

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